Virtualization

Dave Eckhardt
Brian Railing

based on material from:
Mike Kasick
Roger Dannenberg
Glenn Willen
Mike Cui

Apr. 15, 2019
Outline

- **Introduction**
  - What, why?
- **Basic techniques**
  - Simulation
  - Binary translation
- **Kinds of instructions**
- **Virtualization**
  - x86 Virtualization
  - Paravirtualization
- **Summary**
What is Virtualization?

- **Virtualization:**
  - Practice of presenting and partitioning computing resources in a *logical* way rather than partitioning according to *physical* reality

- **Virtual Machine:**
  - An execution environment (logically) identical to a physical machine, with the ability to execute a full operating system
Process vs. Virtualization

- The *Process abstraction* is a "weak, fuzzy" form of virtualization
  - Many process resources exactly match machine resources
    - `%eax, %ebx, ...
  - Some machine resources are not visible to processes
    - `%cr0
  - Some process resources are "inspired by" hardware
    - SIGALARM
  - Some process resources are "invented" - don't match any hardware feature
    - "current directory" and "umask"

- Virtualization is "more like hardware" than processes
  - What runs inside virtualization is an operating system
    Process : Kernel :: Kernel : ?
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Process : Kernel :: Kernel : Virtual-machine monitor
Process/Kernel Stack

Physical Machine

Kernel

Process

Process

Process
Virtualization Stack

Virtual Machine Monitor (VMM)

Physical Machine
Why Use Virtualization?

- Run two operating systems on the same machine!
  - “Windows+Linux” was VMware's first business model
  - Hobbyists like to run ancient-history OS's
- Debugging OS's is more pleasant
  - Also: instrumenting what an OS does
  - Monitoring a captive OS for security infestations
- “Process abstraction” at the kernel layer
  - Separate file system
  - Multiple machine owners
  - Better protection than one kernel's processes (in theory)
    - “Small, secure” hypervisor, “small, fair” scheduler
Why Use Virtualization?

- **Huge** impact on enterprise hosting
  - No longer need to sell whole machines
  - Sell machine *slices*
    - “xx GB RAM, yy cores” - smoother than “n Dell PowerEdge 2600's”
      - Can put competitors on the same physical hardware
- Can separate instance of VM from instance of hardware
  - Live migration of VM from machine to machine
    - Deal with machine failures or machine-room flooding
  - VM replication to provide fault tolerance
    - “Why bother doing it at the application level?”
- Can overcommit hardware
  - Most VM's are not 100% busy all the time
  - If one suddenly becomes 100% busy, move it to a dedicated machine for a few hours, then move it back
Virtualization in Enterprise

- Separates product (OS services) from physical resources (server hardware)
- Live migration example:
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Full-System Simulation (Simics 1998)

- Software simulates hardware components that make up a target machine
  - Interpreter executes each instruction & updates the software representation of the hardware state
- Approach is very accurate but very slow
- Great for OS development & debugging
  - “Break on triple fault” is better than real hardware suddenly rebooting
  - Possible to debug a driver for a hardware device that hasn't been built yet
System Emulation
(Bochs, DOSBox, QEMU, fake86)

- Emulate just enough of hardware components to create an accurate “user experience”
- Typically CPU & memory are emulated
  - Buses are not
  - Devices communicate with CPU & memory directly
- Shortcuts are taken to achieve better performance
  - Reduces overall system accuracy
  - Code designed to run correctly on real hardware executes “pretty well”
  - Code not designed to run correctly on real hardware exhibits wildly divergent behavior
System Emulation Techniques

- **Pure interpretation:**
  - Interpret each guest instruction
  - Perform a semantically equivalent operation on host

- **Static translation:**
  - Translate each guest instruction to host instructions *once*
  - Example: DEC “mx” translator
    - Input: MIPS Ulrix executable
    - Output: Alpha OSF/1 executable
  - Limited applicability; self-modifying code doesn't work
System Emulation Techniques

- **Dynamic translation:**
  - Translate a block of guest instructions to host instructions just prior to execution of that block
  - Cache translated blocks for better performance
  - Like a Smalltalk/Java “JIT”

- **Dynamic recompilation & adaptive optimization:**
  - Discover which algorithm the guest code implements
  - Substitute with an optimized version on the host
  - Hard
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Kinds of Instructions

- “Regular”
- “Special”
- Devices (magic side-effects)
Kinds of Instructions

- **“Regular”**
  - ADD, XOR
  - Load, store
  - Branch, push, pop

- **“Special”**
  - CLI/STI, HLT, read/modify %cr3

- Devices (magic side-effects)
  - INB/OUTB
  - Stores into video RAM!

- How do we emulate?
  - “Regular”, “Special” - just simulate the CPU
  - Devices – *very* difficult!
    - Thousands of devices exist, each one is extremely complex
    - A device emulator may be 100 lines of code, or 10,000
The Need for Speed

- “Slow” is easy
  - Simulation is naturally slow
  - Binary translation requires lots of “compilation”

- Key observation
  - “Run virtual X on physical X” should be faster than “run virtual X on physical Y”
  - “x86 on x86” should be faster than “x86 on PowerPC”
  - We don't need to *simulate* hardware if we can *use* it
    - “The best simulation of REP STOSB is REP STOSB”

- `while(1):
  - Find a big block of “regular” instructions
  - Load up register values, jump to start of block
    - These instructions run at full speed
  - When something goes wrong, figure out a fix
    - This part is slow
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Full Virtualization

- IBM CP-40 (1967)
  - Supported 14 simultaneous S/360 virtual machines
- Later evolved into CP/CMS and VM/CMS (still in use)
  - 1,000 mainframe users, each with a private mainframe, running a text-based single-process “OS”
  - Defines characteristics of a Virtual Machine Monitor (VMM)
  - Describes a set of architecture features sufficient to support virtualization
Virtual Machine Monitor

- **Equivalence:**
  - Provides an environment essentially identical with the original machine

- **Efficiency:**
  - Programs running under a VMM should exhibit only minor decreases in speed

- **Resource Control:**
  - VMM is in complete control of system resources

Process : Kernel :: VM : VMM
Popek & Goldberg Instruction Classification

- **Sensitive instructions:**
  - Attempt to change configuration of system resources
    - Disable interrupts
    - Change count-down timer value
    - ...
  - Illustrate different behaviors depending on system configuration

- **Privileged instructions:**
  - Trap if the processor is in user mode
  - Do not trap in supervisor mode
“... a virtual machine monitor may be constructed if the set of sensitive instructions for that computer is a subset of the set of privileged instructions.”

- Each instruction must either:
  - Exhibit the same result in user and supervisor modes
  - Else trap if executed in user mode
- Then a VMM can run a guest kernel in user mode!
  - Sensitive instructions are trapped, handled by VMM
- Architectures that meet this requirement:
  - IBM S/370, Motorola 68010+, PowerPC, others.
x86 Virtualization

- x86 ISA (pre-2005) does not meet the Popek & Goldberg requirements for virtualization!
- ISA contains 17+ sensitive, unprivileged instructions:
  - SGDT, SIDT, SLDT, SMSW, PUSHF, POPF, LAR, LSL, VERR, VERW, POP, PUSH, CALL, JMP, INT, RET, STR, MOV
  - Most simply reveal that the “kernel” is running in user mode
    - PUSHF
    - PUSH %CS
  - Some execute inaccurately
    - POPF
- Virtualization is still possible, requires workarounds
The “POPF Problem”

PUSHF # %EFLAGS onto stack
ANDL $0x003FFDFF, (%ESP) # Clear IF on stack
POPF # %EFLAGS from stack

- If run in supervisor mode, interrupts are now off
- What “should” happen if this is run in user mode?
The “POPF Problem”

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• If run in supervisor mode, interrupts are now off
• What “should” happen if this is run in user mode?
  - Attempting a privileged operation should trap to VMM
  - If it doesn't trap, the VMM can't simulate it
    • Because the VMM won't even know it happened
• What happens on the x86?
The “POPF Problem”

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- What “should” happen if this is run in user mode?
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- What happens on the x86?
  - CPU “helpfully” ignores changes to privileged bits when POPF runs in user mode!
  - So that sequence does nothing, no trap, VMM can't simulate

```assembly
PUSHF            # %EFLAGS onto stack
ANDL $0x003FFDFF, (%ESP) # Clear IF on stack
POPF            # %EFLAGS from stack
```
VMware (1998)

- Runs guest operating system in ring 3
  - Maintains the illusion of running the guest in ring 0
- **Insensitive** instruction sequences run by CPU at full speed:
  - `movl 8(%ebp), %ecx`
  - `addl %ecx, %eax`
- **Privileged** instructions trap to the VMM:
  - `cli`
- **Sensitive, unprivileged** instructions handled by *binary translation*:
  - `popf ⇒ int $99`
Virtual Memory

- We've virtualized instruction execution
  - How about other resources?
- Kernels use physical memory to implement virtual memory
  - How do we virtualize physical memory?
    - Each guest kernel must be protected from the others, so we can't let them access physical memory
    - Ok, use virtual memory (obvious so far, isn't it?)


Virtual Memory

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- Kernels use physical memory to implement virtual memory
  - How do we virtualize physical memory?
    - Each guest kernel must be protected from the others, so we can't let them access physical memory
    - Ok, use virtual memory (obvious so far, isn’t it?)
  - But guest kernels themselves provide virtual memory to their processes
    - They like to “MOV %EAX, %CR3”
    - We can't allow them to do that!
    - Can we simulate it??
VM – Guest-kernel view

Guest believes its RAM has frames 0..N
VM – Fiction vs. Reality

Virtual Page

Virtual Frame

Guest view

Guest believes this is a frame number, but it's just a number

Physical Frame

Actual frame number – guest kernel must not be allowed to specify!
VM – How to do it?

Virtual Page → Virtual Frame → Physical Frame

Guest view

Guest believes this is a frame number, but it's just a number

Actual frame number – guest kernel must not be allowed to specify!

Note: traditional x86 VM hardware does not implement “map, then map again”
VM – How to do it?

Virtual Page

Virtual Frame

Guest believes this is a frame number, but it's just a number

Physical Frame

Actual frame number – guest kernel must not be allowed to specify!

This is what must go into the actual page table
VM – Shadow Page Tables

“Page-table compiler” - Runs on “MOVL %EAX, %CR3”  
Also runs on INVLPG

Guest view

Reality
Shadow Page Tables

- Accesses to %cr3 are trapped by hardware
  - Store into %cr3?
    - “Compile” guest-kernel page table into real page table
      - Map guest frame numbers into actual frame numbers
    - Secretly set %cr3 to point to real page table
  - Fetch from %cr3?
    - Return the guest-kernel “physical” address of the virtual page table in guest-kernel virtual memory, not the physical address of the actual page table in physical memory
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- Accesses to guest-kernel page tables are special too!
  - It's ok for the guest kernel to examine its fake page table
  - But if guest stores into a fake PTE, we must re-compile
  - So virtual page tables are read-only pages for the guest
Shadow Page Tables

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- **Guest kernel sets some pages to “kernel only”**
  - Each guest page table compiles to *two* real page tables
    - guest-kernel-mode has all pages, guest-user-mode doesn't
Wow, This is Hard!

- Many tricks played to improve performance
  - Compiling page-tables is slow, so cache old compilations
  - When to garbage-collect them?
- PTEs contain dirty & accessed bits
  - Won't cover that today
- Is there an easier way??
Wow, This is Hard!

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- Is there an easier way??
  1. Fix the hardware
  2. Blur the hardware ("paravirtualization")
Hardware Assisted Virtualization

- Modern x86's *do* meet Popek & Goldberg requirements
  - Intel VT-x (2005), AMD-V (2006)
- VT-x introduces two new operating modes:
  - “VMX root” operation & “VMX non-root” operation
  - VMM runs in VMX root, guest OS runs in non-root
    - Both modes support all privilege rings
  - Guest OS runs in (non-root) ring 0
    - VMM tells hardware “Enter guest mode, but trap on these conditions: ...”
    - If guest kernel runs a sensitive instruction, hardware does a “VM exit” back to VMM, indicates why
- 2nd-generation VT-x has “EPT”: hardware fix for VM
  - Host sets up page tables giving “virtual physical pages” to guest
  - Guest page tables map “virtual virtual pages” to them
Paravirtualization (Denali 2002, Xen 2003)

- **Motivation**
  - Binary translation and shadow page tables are hard

- **First observation:**
  - If OS is open-source, it can be modified at the source level to make virtualization explicit (not transparent), and easier
    - Replace “MOVL %EAX, %CR3” with “install_page_table()”
    - Typically only a small fraction of the guest kernel needs to be edited
    - Guest *user* code is not changed at all

- **Paravirtualizing VMMs (hypervisors) virtualize only a subset of the x86 execution environment**
  - Run guest kernels in rings 1-3
    - No illusion about running in a virtual environment
    - Guest kernels may not use sensitive, unprivileged instructions and expect a privileged result
Paravirtualization (Denali 2002, Xen 2003)

- Second observation:
  - Regular VMMs must emulate hardware for devices
    - Disk, Ethernet, etc
    - Performance is poor due to constrained device API
      - To “send packet”, must emulate many device-register accesses (inb/outb or MMIO, interrupt enable/disable)
      - Each step results in a trap
    - Already modifying guest kernel, why not provide virtual device drivers?
      - Virtual Ethernet could export send_packet(addr, len)
        - This requires only one trap
  - “Hypercall” interface:
    syscall : kernel :: hypercall : hypervisor
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Are We Having Fun Yet?

- Virtualization is great if you need it
  - If you must have 35 /etc/passwd's, 35 sets of users, 35 Ethernet cards, etc.
  - There are many techniques, which work (are secure and fast enough)
- Virtualization is overkill if we need only isolation
  - Remember the Java “virtual machine”??
    - Secure isolation for multiple applications
    - Old approach – Smalltalk (1980)
    - New approach – Google App Engine, Heroku, etc.
- Open question
  - How best to get isolation, machine independence?
Summary

- What virtualization does
  - Multiple OS's on one laptop
  - Debugging, security analysis
  - Enterprise
    - Efficiency
    - Reliability (outage resistance)

- The problem
  - Kinds of instructions

- Solutions
  - Binary translation (useful for light-weight uses)
  - {Full, hardware assisted, para-}virtualization

- Many things not covered today!
  - “I/O virtualization” - attaching real devices to virtual machines
    - ...

Further Reading


